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## 1 student, 1 laptop proves costly



Harkness, Kyndell, Star Tribune

Eighth graders Alex Davis, right, and Matthew Dinger researched anti-semitism in social studies class at South View Middle School.

Several school districts that bought take-home laptops for whole classes or schools couldn't afford it long-term. Some schools are looking to cheaper iPads or netbooks instead.

By **SARAH LEMAGIE**<sup>1</sup>, Star Tribune

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A computer for every student: It's a dream of many K-12 school leaders, who predict that students will soon use personal laptops or

similar devices in class every day.

But who will pay for them?

Fighting to stay relevant in an increasingly tech-savvy society, some metro-area school districts have spent big bucks to buy take-home laptops for students in entire classes -- even entire schools.

But several have run into the same problem: They can't afford to keep buying all those laptops.

In the Stillwater district, considered a local technology pioneer, the school board recently discontinued a program that had put a take-home laptop in the hands of every student at Oak-Land Junior High. In Edina, a similar pilot project with 150 eighth-graders ended after a year. In Hopkins, a program that sent laptops home with about 650 elementary students a year was retired this spring.

"It was an extraordinarily beneficial program for those classes and teachers," said Sid Voss, the Hopkins district's director of educational technology. "But we also knew it was affecting our ability to maintain the technology resources for students across the district. ... We were really being

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squeezed."

Instead, those districts and others are taking a variety of steps to increase technology access: Buying more laptops that stay on campus. Opening up school wireless networks so students can get online with their own Internet devices. Working with vendors to give families discounts on computers.

And some districts are looking at cheaper iPads or netbooks for one-to-one computing programs.

The potential of those smaller devices is "very intriguing to us," said Voss, who estimated that the Hopkins district could set up a student with a netbook or iPad for about half the cost of a laptop.

One thing tech gurus tend to agree on: Someday soon, personal Internet devices of some kind will be standard-issue in classrooms.

It's unclear who will provide them. "Is it the student's or ours? We don't know," Voss said.

The answer may be both. "I think the burden will be shared between families and the

school system," said John Weisser, the Bloomington district's secondary technology coordinator.

Many students can't afford their own computing devices, and public schools have a duty to give all students access to the same resources, Weisser and others say. But footing the bill isn't easy for districts, either.

## Long-term funding is tough

Stillwater's take-home laptop program, which was funded by a technology levy, ended primarily because of funding issues as the computers wore out and needed replacing, said Mike Dronen, the district's technology coordinator.

Plus, the district has two junior highs, and "we couldn't afford to have it at both ... so there were questions of equity," he said.

The district took a different approach at its other junior high. While Oak-Land students got take-home laptops starting in 2004, Stillwater Junior High provided laptop carts that teachers could check out for students to use in class. The school had about one computer for every three students, according to a 2008 report in which University of Minnesota researchers evaluated both

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programs.

That study found many ways in which both programs may have improved teaching and learning. But it found little difference in students' growth in reading and math at the two schools, as measured by standardized tests. That's another reason the school board ended the one-to-one program, said board member George Hoeppner.

"We were unable to convince ourselves that maintaining the program was the best thing for student achievement across the district," he said.

However, the study did not answer questions such as how well the laptops spurred creativity and 21st century skill-building, said Dronen, who still believes well-planned one-to-one programs are "a best-case scenario."

New Prague High School is one place where some students are enjoying the sole use of school computers that they can take home.

Seniors in Carrie DeValk's composition class were issued netbooks this fall that they use for online chats and research. Reading assignments are typically paperless, and students use Google Docs to review each

other's essays.

"It's so helpful," said senior Jed Kreuser. "Instead of hauling books and books and textbooks, we can just take one flash drive and our netbook, and that's all we need, really."

The New Prague school board is likely to consider expanding the program, putting a netbook in the hands of every ninth-grader next fall. Students would keep the netbooks until they graduate, and the district would keep giving the devices to incoming freshmen every year until every student in the building had one.

In the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan district, a federal grant awarded this fall will fund the purchase of iPads for every student at Heritage Middle School, though the district is not sure when and how the devices will be deployed.

Superintendent Jay Haugen envisions a not-so-distant future in which all students come to class with a "digital backpack," a device of some kind that holds all their textbooks and assignments. Those devices could transform education, he said, enabling students to watch videos of lectures as homework and spend more time in class on lessons that

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promote creativity and collaboration.

The district has estimated that the iPads and covers will cost about \$700 per student. "I think we're pretty confident we can sustain it," Haugen said.

Sarah Lemagie • 952-882-9016

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1. <http://ezurl.co/55d51>

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A horizontal advertisement for Cosmic Bingo at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel. The background is a vibrant purple and blue space-themed design with stars and nebulae. On the left, the "COSMIC BINGO" logo is displayed in a stylized, glowing font. To the right of the logo, the text "JUST DAUB IT!" is written in large, bold, black letters. Below this, it says "FRIDAYS AND SATURDAYS 11 p.m., MIDNIGHT AND LAST CALL". In the top right corner, a yellow banner with black text reads "IT'S JUST \$6". On the right side, the "Mystic LAKE" logo is shown, with "CASINO • HOTEL" underneath it. At the bottom right, the website "mysticlake.com" is listed. A small line of text at the bottom center states "Owned and Operated by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community".

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